

Robert Purkis House  
37 Charles Field Street  
Providence  
Providence County  
Rhode Island

HABS No. RI-202

HABS  
RI,  
4-PROV,  
102-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction  
143 South Third Street  
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

## ROBERT PURKIS HOUSE

HABS  
RI,  
4-PROV,  
102-

Address: 37 Charles Field Street, Providence, Providence  
County, Rhode Island. Plat 12, Lot 412.

Present Owner  
and Occupant: Mr. and Mrs. John R. Frazier

Present Use: Dwelling.

Brief Statement  
of Significance: This is a typical example of a medium-sized wood  
house, with very few alterations, built about 1823.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History

## 1. Original and subsequent owners:

- 1808 Will Wait Smith..."To my daughter Martha Brown Howell, the occupation of and all my real estate rents, profits, etc...Isaac Brown and Martha Howell, executors...Will
- 1825 ...Mss. fire insurance records of the Providence Mutual Insurance Company at the Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, Rhode Island, Vol. 4...policy #3047. Robert Purkis for \$1800. House on N side of Charles Field Street...wood. 33' in front and 30' front to rear. 2 stories high front and rear with an out-kitchen adjoining 12' x 16'..occupied as a dwelling house.
- 1826 Martha Howell and Isaac Bowen, ex u/w of Wait Smith sells for \$400 to Robert Purkis, mariner, a certain tract of land bounded: S by Charles Field Street 50'; W by Solomon Townsend and Gideon Hatch 100'; N by Wait Smith...Deed Book 51, page 352, in Providence City Hall.
- 1826 Purkis, Robert, mariner, Providence Directory.
- 1854 Property is taxed to Robert Purkis heirs.
- 1923 Alfred Wilson, trustee gives quit claim deed to Sarepta Purkis and Elizabeth F P Johnson to the above property.
- 1927 Melvin C. Johnson and wife Elizabeth F P Johnson sell to Hugh Black jr a certain tract of land with all buildings and improvements bounded S by Charles Field Street 59.08' (the W boundary of lot conveyed being 201.35' E of the corner of

Brown and Charles Field Street); W by Helen Allen, mostly, and Brown University 98.33'; N and E by Alice Vaughn...being the same estate formerly belonging to Robert Purkis...Deed Book 705, page 304, in Providence City Hall.

1930 Property taxed to John R Frazier

1948 Property taxed to John R. Frazier and wife Mary.

2. Date of erection: c. 1823 for Captain Robert Purkis, according to notes prepared by Louise Damon for an uncompleted publication of the Colonial Dames based on records in possession of the owners of the house.
3. Notes on alterations and additions: Except for the front doorway, the house appears to have had very few alterations. The present front doorway was added in 1937 replacing one that was damaged in a storm. It was designed by Mrs. Frazier, present owner, and Margaret Geddes, and carved by William Boogar.
4. Other views: For a photograph of the entire house, see HABS records for the Solomon Townsend House, 35 Charles Field Street, Providence, HABS No. RI- 221

Prepared by Antoinette F. Downing and Elvira Gowdey  
for the Providence Preservation Society  
January 1962

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: This is a typical example of a medium-sized wood house, built about 1823, with very few alterations or additions except for the front doorway.
2. Condition of fabric: Good

### B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: Main block, 33' (five bays) wide in front x 30' deep, two stories, facing south; one-and-a-half-story kitchen wing to north, 12' x 16'.
2. Foundations: Random ashlar on front. Stueco on sides.
3. Wall construction: Clapboards, 4-1/4" average exposure, beaded corner boards.

4. Stoops: Small brownstone entrance stoop parallel to house with double flights of steps, four steps one side, five other side; simple iron railing typical of this period in Providence.
5. Chimneys: Two inside brick chimneys in main block, one in rear wing.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doors: Present entrance door with wide, elliptical, louvered fan and side lights added in 1937, eight-panel wood door.
  - b. Windows and shutters: Six over six light double hung windows with louvered shutters, simple wood frames.
7. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: Gable, asphalt shingles.
  - b. Cornice: Molded cornice, returned slightly at gable ends.

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: Central hall plan. Central hall 6' wide, first floor ceilings 7-1/2' high. Four rooms of equal size in main block, kitchen in rear wing. Central hall divided with front and rear stairs. Second floor arrangement similar to first with four bedrooms in main block and bathroom over kitchen.
2. Stairways: Main stair, straight run with 90° turn at top, open string, molded handrail, three slender rectangular balusters per step, turned newel, sawn step end scroll ornaments. Rear stairs nearly identical but without step end ornament.
3. Flooring: Original wide board floors except in dining room (northwest room on first floor) which has later strip floor.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster, papered or painted.
5. Doors and doorways: Six-panel doors, raised-panel doors, double molded mitered architraves.
6. Trim: Molded chair rail through much of first floor. Corner posts of heavy timber frame with beaded edges exposed on interior.

7. Hardware: Various kinds of hardware including iron latches, brass knobs, porcelain knobs, butt hinges.
8. Lighting: Electric
9. Heating: Central heat plus fireplaces in all rooms; five on each floor. One-story wood mantels, with pilasters or colonettes in more important front rooms.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: Narrow, level lot, house on sidewalk at front, parking area at west side, yard in rear.
2. Enclosures: Brick walls (of adjoining property) north and east sides, wood fence on west.
3. Walks, driveways: Asphalt sidewalk in front; gravel drive.
4. Landscaping: Informal rear yard.

Prepared by Osmund R. Overby, Architect  
National Park Service  
January 1962